

**Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Regarding Department of Social Services and Department of Children and Families Budgets**

**Jordan Fairchild
Coordinator and Community Organizer
Keep The Promise Coalition
Wednesday, February 23rd, 2022**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Jordan Fairchild and I am a registered voter in New Fairfield, Connecticut and the Coordinator and Community Organizer for Keep The Promise Coalition. Keep The Promise Coalition is a grassroots, statewide coalition of advocates with lived experience of mental health, addiction, and co-occurring conditions.

I am here to testify in regards to the proposed budget adjustments for DSS and DCF.

First, I'm glad to see an expansion of Mobile Crisis Intervention Services to make them operate 24/7. Crises don't occur on a set schedule and having teams available 24/7 will help ensure a more humane and appropriate response to crises.

I'm also encouraged by the proposed 25% increase in the DSS budget to adult dental provider reimbursement rates for HUSKY. Dental health is an important and necessary component of a person's overall wellbeing, and ensuring everyone has access to dental care will help to prevent more serious complications and costs stemming from avoidable dental issues later on. However, I believe that bringing the adult reimbursement rates to parity with the children's rates would improve provider participation to a greater degree.

I'm also glad that the legislature has rightly chosen to acknowledge the current mental health crisis. This committee's actions and priorities regarding this crisis could be affected, however, by two proposals coming out of the Office of Health Strategy, partially codified by two of the Governor's bills, which would 1) cap total healthcare spending and 2) increase the proportion spent on primary care. Together, these would likely force cuts to other areas of healthcare including behavioral health, dental, and specialist care, impeding the legislature's ability to make much needed rate increases in these areas.

The legislature could also improve health coverage and access for many Connecticut residents by expanding HUSKY to all immigrants in our community and expanding HUSKY C eligibility to far more disabled residents. Funding increases to accommodate raising the income and asset limits for HUSKY C, which currently fall below the Federal Poverty Level, would remove a significant barrier to many in need of the coverage which HUSKY C offers. These limits force otherwise eligible people to either lose their coverage or spend down to qualify for the program, trapping many in poverty.

Likewise, the Governor's budget doesn't accommodate the removal of the income and asset limits for Medconnect, which also make it difficult for some people to enroll in the program, and discourage many from even applying.

Individuals on HUSKY C and Medconnect often have complex medical conditions, which require regular and frequent care. Expanding HUSKY eligibility would be wise from a public health perspective, as it would help prevent devastating health outcomes and avoid the significant costs of worsening untreated medical complications resulting from lack of coverage.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and working to increase access to healthcare in our state.